

Title: **A Pilot Observer Program for the Reduction of Sea Turtle and Other By-catch in Vietnamese Longline Fisheries**

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Abstract: Five species of marine turtles are found within the territorial waters of Vietnam, and all populations are declining. As part of a broader strategy and Action Plan, the Government of Vietnam and WWF Vietnam have launched a two-year project to: 1) document relative gear impacts, and geographic hotspots, for sea turtle interactions and, 2) design and implement a first-of-its-kind observer program for Vietnamese fisheries. This presentation will describe the major results of the first component, providing data on the characteristics and extent of sea turtle interactions with key Vietnamese fisheries through initial research and community interviews. Comprehensive data pertinent to the fishery hotspots in Vietnam will be provided. Together with data on sea turtle catch, fleet size, trends, seasons, timing, mesh size etc., this information has informed major recommendations on the design and structure of an observer program, which will also be described. While some information gaps still exist, the knowledge base has been significantly expanded and this new information has ensured that by-catch reduction efforts - specifically the planned observer program and subsequent gear experiments for long-line fisheries and a Management Options Paper for gillnet fisheries - can be most strategically targeted and planned. Additionally, the role of community participation, capacity-building for local fisheries agencies, and overall stakeholder perceptions and impressions will be reviewed. Finally, the concept of how the sea turtle driver could result in broader applications for observer programs for fisheries management in Vietnam, and how this aligns WWF and government strategies for sustainable fisheries management, will be discussed.